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The cultural non-participant: critical logics and discursive subject identities

Structured Abstract

Purpose: The existence of so-called non-participants are a cultural policy problem in the UK and beyond. Yet the very notion of a cultural non-participant seems nonsensical against the palpable evidence of lived experience. This paper aims to understand ‘who’ a cultural non-participant is by first comprehending ‘what’ the cultural non-participant is and why it exists.

Methodology: Drawing on primary data generated in the form of 40 in-depth qualitative interviews, this paper employs a discursive methodology to explore the critical logics (Howarth, 2010) that underlie the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009) of cultural non-participation and in particular the discursive subject identity of the cultural non-participant.

Findings: Beginning with a discussion about how cultural non-participants are represented as socially deprived and hard to reach, the paper moves on to highlight how they are also presumed to lack knowledge and understanding about what they are rejecting. Their supposed flawed subjectivity is then contrasted with the desirable model of agency claimed by the cultural professionals who seek to change the cultural participation patterns of others. The paper concludes with a consideration of how the existence of the cultural non-participant subject identity limits the extent to which those labelled as such can meaningfully contribute to the field of cultural policy and obscures the extent to which such individuals are culturally disenfranchised.

Limitations: Because of the chosen research approach and the geographical limitations to the data generation, the research makes no claim to generalisability. Therefore, researchers are encouraged to test the discursive logics identified at alternative discursive sites.

Practical Implications: This paper proposes a change in the language used by cultural professionals accompanied by changes in practice that abandoning the identity of the non-participant would demand.

Originality: This paper challenges a taken for granted assumption that cultural non-participants exist 'in the real'

Introduction

The Scottish Government wants to increase attendance at cultural events and places of culture; likewise it wants to see increasing rates of cultural participation across the country (Scottish Government, 2018a). So concerned are they about this that they publish an annual statistic as part of a suite of eighty-one ‘national indicators’ that together give a “measure of national wellbeing” (Scottish Government, 2018b). This aspiration has been publicly tracked for over a decade. Indeed, the commitment to encouraging participation and promoting appreciation of arts and culture were included in the list of Creative Scotland’sⁱ six statutory functions (Scottish Parliament, 2009c, 2009a). In particular, there was a requirement to increase the “diversity of people who access and participate in the arts and culture” (Scottish Parliament, 2009a).

Scotland is not alone in this regard. Across Europe, governments are vexed by what they appear to understand as the ‘problem’ of cultural non-participation (Stevenson et al., 2015; Stevenson, 2013; Balling and Kann-Christensen, 2013; Tomka, 2013). Of course, if there is cultural non-participation, there must be cultural non-participants, and the growing numbers of these non-participants has led the European Commission to proclaim that Europe was becoming a “less cultural continent” (European Commission 2013a, n.p.). Yet who, or what exactly, is a cultural non-participant? Surely everyone takes part in some sort of cultural activity, given that “pretty much everyone listens, reads, watches, dances or sings” (Holden, 2010, p.64). The very notion of a cultural non-participant seems nonsensical against the palpable evidence of lived experience, and yet there are evidently enough cultural non-participants to warrant governments in Scotland and beyond to seek them out and take action to alter their behaviours.

This paper argues that in order to understand ‘who’ a cultural non-participant is one must first comprehend ‘what’ the cultural non-participant is. In answer to this question it is proposed that the cultural non-participant is a discursive subject identity constructed within the discourses of cultural policy and sustained through the practices of cultural professionals. By representing theirs as a flawed model of agency, labelling someone with this identity limits the extent to which they can meaningfully contribute to the field of cultural policy and obscures the extent to which such individuals are culturally disenfranchised.

Background to the research

Existing research that seeks to challenge the ‘problem’ of cultural participation tends to critique how the problem has been framed, rather than questioning its ontological status, considering why it exists, and reflecting on what its existence does to social relations. For example, a significant body of recent work has sought to highlight the prevalence of ‘everyday participation’ (Miles and Ebrey, 2017; Miles and Gibson, 2017; Taylor, 2016; Belfiore et al., 2011) making the argument that “there is no problem if we adopt a notion of cultural participation that extends beyond the arts into spheres of everyday creativity and participation” (Belfiore, 2016, p.209). Such research has lead to a resurgent call for policies that would redistribute resource so as to better support the creation of a ‘cultural democracy’ (Jeffers and Moriarty, 2018; Gross and Wilson, 2018; Evrard, 1997). Yet despite the overwhelming evidence of just how much ‘everyday participation’ goes on, the cultural policy status quo remains stubbornly hard to change and the “public’s chosen forms of cultural expression and engagement” are still not seen as valid (Jancovich, 2011, p.273).

The majority of public funding continues to support the same organisations, in the same places (Stark et al., 2013). The same organisations that represent themselves as working hard at ‘outreach’ and ‘audience development’ (Kemp and Poole, 2016; Lindelof, 2015; Kawashima, 2006; Hayes and Slater, 2002) even when this activity appears to make little meaningful difference to the constituency of their audiences (Taylor, 2016; Warwick Commission, 2015). For it remains the case that in practice it is those who choose not to attend the organisations receiving the vast majority of public subsidy who are represented as the ‘problem’ rather than the inequitable way in which different types of cultural participation are financially supported by the state. Indeed, striving to solve this ‘problem’ remains one of the ways in which arts organisations can legitimise the funding they receive, even if this means less money is available to support the activities that the people they are ‘reaching out’ to may want to participate in.

Methodology

This paper argues that the resilience of cultural participation as a ‘problem’ is because it is a discursive construction located within the field of cultural policy. From this perspective all policies intended to increase cultural participation can be understood as discursive practice that sustains the problem construction and perpetuates the subjectification of certain individuals (Bacchi, 2009). As such, this paper employs a discursive methodology to explore the critical logics (Howarth, 2010) that underlie the problem representation (Bacchi, 2009). The primary data analysed were generated through 40 in-depth interviewsⁱⁱ. In selecting the sample for these interviews it was the principle of exposure (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012) that was paramount. Potential interviewees were selected on the belief that they had

appropriate experience relevant to the field of practice under analysis. In particular, interviewees were selected on the assumption that they would feel able and proficient to talk about the ‘problem’ of cultural non-participation. As such, the majority of individuals approached were working in or for Scottish cultural organisations receiving state subsidy. In addition, some interviews were also conducted with central and local government employees, specifically those with responsibility for distributing public subsidy to support cultural participation (see Table 1 for details of the organisations represented) ⁱⁱⁱ.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Data were analysed for what Howarth (2010) describes as the logics of critical explanation. Three types of discursive logic exist, the social, the political, and the fantasmatic (Howarth, 2010). Respectively, these logics allow social practice to be characterised, contingent social relations to be justified and different social subjects to be attached to specific identities. Practically, these logics were identified through looking for repeatedly occurring descriptions, explanations, and arguments before identifying the basic assumptions and presuppositions upon which these arguments were based. Analysis then progressed to focus on how the various components of the discursive logics could be described, what relationships between them were possible, and what arguments and explanations were most commonly offered with regards to these relationships. While the findings of this analysis were wide ranging (see Stevenson, 2016) this paper will focus specifically on the discursive subject identities that are constructed as part of the ‘problem’ of cultural non-participation.

Searching for a cultural non-participant

In Scotland, rates of cultural participation are monitored through the Scottish Household Survey (Scottish Government, 2009) the existence of which creates a

explicit definition of what ‘counts’ as cultural participation and, by default, who should be statistically understood as a non-participant (see Stevenson, 2013; McCall and Playford, 2012 for a discussion of what the Scottish Household Survey measures). However, the responses of interviewees indicated that in practice no attempt would be made to ascertain if those individuals who were targeted as part of cultural participation projects would fit this statistical definition. Indeed, a number of interviewees explicitly stated that the individuals they worked with already participated in culture elsewhere. For example, going to the cinema, musicals, pantomimes, music festivals or live DJ sets were regularly mentioned by interviewees as being the likely pastimes of the people they were working with, all of which are activities that ‘count’ as cultural participation in the majority of cultural participation surveys. Such responses suggest that rather than being cultural non-participants many of the individuals taking part in state subsidised activities intended to increase cultural participation had simply not participated with that particular organisation or type of activity before^{iv}. As such, there are no guarantees that these activities would alter the headline rates of cultural participation tracked in the Scottish Government’s national indicators.

Instead, and as will be discussed in more detail below, it would appear that being labelled with the identity of the cultural non-participant is primarily based on the ‘type’ of person that certain individuals are assumed to be. As Interviewee 41 stated, they felt they “*made the assumption, if I am perfectly honest, that there are certain sections of society that feel they can’t access culture*”. In particular, there was a presumption in the responses of interviewees that individuals can be labelled as cultural non-participants on the basis of other demographic characteristics. This was evident in the answers given by interviewees when asked about whom, if not cultural

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3 non-participants, their cultural participation activity did focus on. In their responses,
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5 most interviewees spoke about the “*socially excluded*”, “*socially deprived*” or those
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7 “*high on the index of multiple deprivation*”^v. Furthermore, interviewees spoke of
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9 aligning their work with various trends that had come and gone with regards to
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11 particular demographic groups that the Scottish Government had shown an interest in
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13 targeting - “*there is obviously trends that you can very easily pick up, like NEETS*”^{vi},
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15 “*[laughs] they were a trend, and young men*” (Interviewee 2); “*There are sort of*
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17 “*flavours of the month, trends and fashions [of who to engage with]. Young men, that*
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19 “*is quite an interesting one [...] and prisoners are another very popular choice*”
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21 (Interviewee 38).
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26 All of the above is indicative of what might be understood discursively as the
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28 search for a cultural non-participant, in the sense of searching for an existing
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30 discursive subject onto which the subject identity of the cultural non-participant can
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32 be attached. Within the discourses of UK cultural policy it appears to be those who
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34 are the most materially deprived and/or have the lowest social status to which the
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36 label is most commonly attached. This is arguably because the legitimacy of state
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38 subsidy for cultural policies increasingly relies on an abstract faith in the
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40 transformative affect that ‘the arts’ can have on those individuals and communities
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42 who are most economically disadvantaged (Stevenson, 2016; Bjørnsen, 2012; Shiner,
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44 2001). Indeed, when asked why participation with culture should be encouraged,
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46 interviewees tended to speak of the potential for “*life-changing experiences*”
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48 (Interviewee 38) and “*meaningful transformational engagement*” (Interviewee 12).
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53 The dividing practices of modern governance mean that there are always those in
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55 society who the state deems as being in need of such transformation. As such, the
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57 discursive subject of the cultural non-participant provides the ideal boundary object
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(Star and Griesemer, 1989) around which the discourses of the state and the arts can be woven. Through applying this label to those that the state currently deems problematic, the representatives of subsidised arts organisations can locate a subject upon which they can claim to positively act in the interests of society, thus legitimising the privileged relationship of their organisations with the state.

Non-participants are ‘hard to reach’

However, in maintaining the use of this subject identity cultural professionals are also complicit in ensuring that those labeled as cultural non-participants are also written upon by its critical logics. Firstly, it is regularly asserted that non-participants are ‘hard to reach’ and are in some way more difficult to communicate with than other individuals:

Non-participants are generally those people in the hard to reach brackets
(Interviewee 1)

...the hard to reach audience is a luxury that we might tackle if we get project funding. (Interviewee 5)

... I mean... I believe myself that it is important to reach out to the harder to reach audience... that is also where the money is! [laughs] (Interviewee 12)

The label of being ‘hard to reach’ is not exclusive to the discourses of cultural policy; every state institution appears to share the same ‘problem’. Health (Freimuth and Mettger, 1990; Flanagan and Hancock, 2010), education (Day, 2013; Boag-Munroe and Evangelou, 2012), the police (Jones and Newburn, 2001), and local government (Froonjian and Garnett, 2013) all appear to be struggling with what is often described as a complex issue in need of complex solutions (Boag-Munroe and Evangelou, 2012). Despite this supposed complexity it is almost always framed as a need for improved communication (Froonjian and Garnett, 2013) requiring an alteration in the language employed or ‘terms of engagement’ (Day, 2013) by which state institutions

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3 'reach-out' to these individuals. So although representing the cultural non-participant
4 as being 'hard to reach' is not original, it is important. For it contributes towards
5 rendering the 'problem' of cultural non-participation technical – an inability to access
6 or communicate with certain people, which if only it can be overcome through
7 specific interventions will then result in a 'normalisation' of these individuals'
8 activities.
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11 Yet this technical process of 'reaching' those labelled as non-participants is
12 not really that hard (Flanagan and Hancock, 2010; Cook, 2002). As the interviewees
13 in a study about participation in policy consultation stated: "*Who says we are hard to*
14 *reach?*" (Cook, 2002, emphasis in original). It is important to remember that the
15 identity of the cultural non-participant is applied to suitable demographic proxies, and
16 so 'reaching' them only requires identifying a group to label as such. Indeed, many
17 interviewees were able to pinpoint the specific postcodes and locations they would
18 'find' the 'hard to reach' in. For the 'hard to reach' were never so hard to reach that
19 the interviewees failed to do so. Furthermore, the label of 'hard to reach' is also
20 applied to individuals who remain hard to persuade even after they are reached. This
21 is because, in practice, being identified as 'hard to reach' has almost nothing to do
22 with the relative accessibility of an individual. Rather, it is a keyword within the
23 critical logics of the problem construction, a core component of the discursive identity
24 applied by cultural professionals to those whose patterns of cultural participation have
25 not been changed by the communications and practices of the organisations that must
26 be seen to be 'reaching out' to them (Freimuth and Mettger, 1990).
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55 **Non-participants are constrained by 'barriers'**

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57 Given that decades of outreach and participation work appear to have done
58 little to alter patterns of cultural participation (Stevenson et al., 2015) such work (and
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those whose employment and status depends on it) risks being seen to have failed. As such, additional explanation is required within the critical logics of the problem construction as to why, when reached, the supposedly ‘hard to reach’ fail to change their behaviour. It is at this point that the concept of barriers is employed, an image synonymous with a “*brick wall*” (Interviewee 14) or “*blockage*” (Interviewee 22). This second keyword represents those labelled as non-participants as being part of an excluded and hard to reach minority, eager to participate in the same way that a supposed majority do but stopped by tangible barriers that the state, through the cultural organisations and activities it funds, is striving to eliminate.

Importantly, this keyword obscures the existence of an alternative identity for those labelled as cultural non-participants. As has been argued elsewhere (Stevenson, 2013) a distinction can be made between those who express an interest or desire to participate in an activity but who are hindered from doing so and those who have expressed no interest or desire in the same activity and identify no detriment to their life because of it. This is significant because it remains the case that a large number of people simply express no interest or desire to participate with the organisations and activities that the state subsidises. National and international surveys regularly show that it is a lack of interest that is the primary explanation given for not participating (European Commission, 2013b; Charlton et al., 2010; Scottish Government, 2009; Scottish Arts Council, 2008). However, if the dominant discourses of cultural policy were to explicitly acknowledge such disinterested individuals exist it would disrupt the discursive logics on which the legitimacy of state subsidies for the arts relies. Although the barrier constrained cultural non-participant can be argued to value that which is receiving subsidy even though they may currently be prevented from attending, acknowledging that many face no tangible barriers to that which is

subsidised by the state means accepting that many are paying for the provision of activities about which they have no interest and may not value. As such, it is vital that the discursive subject identity of the cultural non-participant includes an explanation that represents such disinterestedness as something other than a legitimate position of disesteem for the state-supported esoteric interest of a minority. It is to this purpose that the concept of barriers is effectively deployed.

Not for the likes of me, or, they don't know what they don't know

Specifically, it was the mental or psychological barrier that was employed most often by interviewees. Many believed that cultural non-participants held a 'not for the likes of me' attitude^{vii} that should be challenged. Indeed, in her notable 2013 speech on cultural policy in Scotland Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs, stated that she didn't want people to be constrained by such an attitude, a position shared by the majority of those interviewed:

Some people are very much at home in that circle, but not everyone is. Not everyone thinks that it's for them, that's what we try to change (Interviewee 1)

It is important that people in Scotland feel confident about attending a theatre and that they feel it's for them [...] we go out to communities and we say, no this is for you actually (Interviewee 2)

Once that person is engaged with a cultural activity [...] if they can say then it is not for them, I will be amazed. (Interviewee 3)

These quotes are indicative of the extent to which interviewees framed the act of stating a belief that an activity is not for you as something problematic. So much so that it is necessary and indeed legitimate for cultural professionals to attempt to change that belief. In particular, there was a common assumption amongst interviewees that those labeled as cultural non-participants were not having, and most likely had never had, the type of supposedly unique experience provided by the sort of

state subsidised cultural organisations and activities they represented. Such an assumption allows a ‘common sense’ assertion to be made that it is inevitable these individuals choose not to interact with what the state is providing as they are unaware of its value and the extent to which they would benefit from doing so. As a number of interviewees stated, non-participants ‘don’t know what they don’t know’:

...of course they don’t know that they don’t know, that is the irony of it, you don’t know what you don’t know until you have learnt that you did not know it.

(Interviewee 21)

...because we are not in the business of giving people what they want are we? We are in the business of giving people things they didn’t know they wanted.

(Interviewee 4)

I think it is about being challenged with stuff they didn’t know they don’t know.

(Interviewee 14)

Like much of the discursive logic of cultural policy in the UK, these arguments have their roots in the nineteenth century. Indeed when John Stuart Mill faced the same difficulty in explaining the behaviour of the populace he employed the same response. His justification for why some appeared to prefer the ‘simple pleasures’ over those that were supposed to afford them greater benefit was, in the first instance, that they had not had the opportunity to experience the ‘higher pleasures’ and were therefore unable to make an informed judgement. Once one had experienced such pleasures he did not believe that anyone would ever consent to give them up, no matter how much of the ‘simple pleasure’ they were offered as an alternative (Mill, 2001 [1863], n.p.).

As such, the job of state subsidised arts organisations and activities has always been about providing opportunities for such experiences, and in so doing reshaping the acculturation of the assumed cultural non-participant, in particular with regards to their values and beliefs about which activities will be of greatest benefit to them. For although interviewees described the projects they undertook in the name of ‘outreach’

as “*an opportunity to make the value judgement*” (Interviewee 13) or “*a case of giving non-participants the tools, language and experiences to critique if this is for them*” (Interviewee 40), the suggestion that someone might not positively value what was on offer appeared difficult for interviewees to countenance. For example, when Interviewee 14 was asked whether it is ever all right for someone to say something is not for them, it was clear that they did not want to express the logical conclusion of someone having tried something and found it to be of no apparent value to them. Instead, they quickly shifted the focus on to the potential for what they understood to be a positive outcome: “*yes it is perfectly OK for folks to say that it is not for the likes of me but then it is OK for us to go, well try it again*”. Likewise, while Interviewee 37 acknowledged the possibility that someone might not value what was being offered, they stressed this was not really the desired outcome: “*if it is not right for them then absolutely don’t come [...] but really, the hope is that when they encounter it they will always want to come again*”.

The ‘right’ kind of experience

However, when it was explicitly suggested that an individual’s dislike for an experience should be respected if they had encountered something similar in the past, or after they had been ‘reached-out’ to and still found no apparent value in what was on offer, the common response of interviewees was this would only be the case if the previous interaction had been of the ‘right kind’:

...but given the right information before they go, then the right experience, then regardless of who they are I think they would enjoy it. (Interviewee 22)
Once they have tried it, yeah, as long as they have been given the right teacher and the right environment, [...] I would say that they are likely to be engaged once they have had it in the right location for them [...] and that they have had the right staff with them (Interviewee 2)

Here, the critical logics of the problem construction assert that once an individual gains the ‘right’ knowledge through having been helped to access the ‘right’ opportunities, provided by the ‘right’ people they will inevitably “know enough to appreciate the wonderfulness of the arts that they currently disdain, mistrust or are bored by” (Jensen, 2002, p.153); or as Interviewee 14 said: “*once it makes sense then automatically you are going to want to do it*”.

As has been shown above, in being asked to explain the problem of cultural non-participation, all of the interviewees employed a vicious cycle of discursive logic that consistently renders technical the political. Any rejection of the organisations and activities that are subsidised by the state is represented as a result of some structural flaw in the nature of the interaction, or a personal flaw in the knowledge and experience of the person making the rejection, rather than an informed expression of their values. As such, within the field of cultural policy, it is impossible for anyone labelled a cultural non-participant to legitimately question the value of that which they are being offered. For example, as Interviewee 22 said, if you remove all the barriers and the non-participant still doesn’t develop an interest then it was important not to “*drop it*” and dismiss the individual as a “*lost cause*”. Leaving to one side for a moment the implication that someone who chooses not to do something is ‘lost’ and the associated implications of failing to keep to the ‘right’ path, what this highlights is the apparent impossibility of ‘non-participation’ to ever be accepted as non-problematic within the field of cultural policy. As this paper will now go on to argue, this is in stark opposition to the possible responses available to those, such as the cultural professionals interviewed for this study, who have not been labeled with the subject identity of the cultural non-participant.

Non-participation does not make you a non-participant

As has already been discussed, a ‘not for the likes of me’ attitude is a core component of the discursive identity of a cultural non-participant. It is an attitude that is associated with statements such as these:

[Discussing why they don’t go to the opera] *Because I am thinking that I am going to be bored half way through because it is just not my thing.*
Opera and theatre is not really my bag
I hate ballet and I hate opera with an absolute passion
I am not a great fan of the ballet I am afraid, I like opera but not ballet, quite why that is I don’t know!
I don’t really go to much classical music [Interviewer: Why?] *I don’t like it*
[laughs] ... I don’t like it, there you go, I don’t really understand it, so I don’t really like it, it just isn’t my thing

Quotes like these are therefore not unusual for a study, such as this one, that focuses on cultural participation. However, what makes these quotes of particular interest is that they are not from individuals who would be labelled as cultural non-participants. Rather, these are the opinions of the cultural professionals interviewed for the present study; individuals working in state subsidised organisations, each with a degree of responsibility for trying to alter the choices others make. As such, whether someone is classified as socially deprived, an outreach and engagement officer for a theatre, or the director of a national cultural organisation, it would appear that they may well share similar opinions about the opera or a night at the ballet.

For some of the interviewees, this apparent irony was in no way problematic and was simply one of the “*funny things*” (Interviewee 17) about those who work in the cultural sector. Interviewee 21 recalled a colleague that used to say “*I work in the arts, I don’t go to the arts*” while explaining that they personally felt those working in the arts are primarily interested in their own field of activity and rarely go outside of it

(this is supported by the findings of Jancovich, 2015). Another said they didn't worry that despite the purpose of their job being about increasing the number of people coming to the theatre, they "*don't even got to the theatre [themselves] as a choice*" (Interviewee 14). In addition, one interviewee spoke of the fact that while they went "*to a lot of stuff*" it was only "*because I get complementary tickets, I don't think I would go otherwise*" (Interviewee 30); a factor that also appeared to influence the participation patterns of a number of other interviewees.

Likewise, the argument that individuals don't know what they don't know is a self-evident truth for everyone, not only those labelled as cultural non-participants. Take for example Interviewee 26 who stated that: "*I am really bad at going to new things; it will be based on what I know, it is always based on what I know*". An opinion very similar to that of Interviewee 38 who said that: "*if I am going to make a choice about what to spend money on then I am going to stay with things I am already comfortable with*". Likewise, Interviewee 43 acknowledged their own narrow patterns of participation, but defended it with the assertion that: "*like millions of people in this country, by the time I have done a full weeks work [...] none of us want to spend money on stuff we are not sure about*". However, if it is considered that only 5% of the Scottish population attends the opera in any one year, and only 4% go to the ballet (Stevenson, 2013), then it is perhaps not surprising so few cultural professionals are themselves not participating with substantial swathes of that which receives state subsidy. What is unclear though, is why such patterns of cultural participation are problematic when exhibited by some but not others.

Open and omnivorous

When asked why it was acceptable for them to dismiss the unknown as being ‘not for them’ when they found this response so problematic in others, interviewees commonly stressed their individual agency and associated personal preferences:

I’m perfectly able as an individual to be able to decide what I would and wouldn’t do. Maybe I am reluctant to try stuff, but you know, ultimately I’m happy with that and it’s my decision, I’m grown up and ugly enough to decide what I want to engage with myself (Interviewee 3)

[When asked why they chose doing one activity over another] *Well I suppose that is my personal taste* (Interviewee 5)

[Talking about why they dislike ballet and opera] *I think it is because my personal preference is language...* (Interviewee 26)

Yet such apparent acceptance of the primacy of individual taste renders the policy problem of cultural non-participation highly problematic. If cultural professionals wouldn’t go to the ballet or take part in some cosplay^{viii} at ComicCon and that’s acceptable, how can they justify their professional practice in which they challenge someone else’s decision not to come to the gallery or theatre that they work in? For most of the interviewees the justification lay in what they perceived as their openness to trying new things; a positive trait that many explicitly laid claim to. Indeed, it was regularly offered as evidence that despite their stated disinterest in certain activities they were not narrow-minded in the manner that cultural non-participants are:

I wouldn’t be that interested in doing things like that. But generally I would give everything a go. (Interviewee 20)

I don’t go to that many classical music concerts. But I am open-minded and I have been to lots of different things. (Interviewee 12)

[Opera and musical theatre] *that is something I find really difficult to engage with [...] Other than that I think most things I am interested in experimenting with [...] whether I would actively choose to book tickets though is perhaps a different thing* (Interviewee 22)

This is indicative of the degree to which the discourse of omnivorousness (Friedman, 2012; Bennett et al., 2009; Sullivan and Katz-Gerro, 2007; Peterson, 1992) carries a positive connotation within the field of cultural policy and beyond. Within this discourse what is of particular value is espousing “the capacity and willingness to learn and to choose as opposed to the inability or unwillingness to do so” (Ollivier 2008, p.124). As such, by representing themselves as being open to doing new things at some point in the future, the interviewees once again signify that their own patterns of cultural participation are not problematic no matter how particular or subjective they may appear in practice.

Stretching oneself

While those labelled as cultural non-participants require an external agent to challenge them, the interviewees and anyone else who can claim to be ‘open’ are understood as being able to challenge themselves:

I go places to be challenged, I go places to get challenged on what I perceive to be the blocks I have. (Interviewee 21)

...but if I decide to consciously change that [lack of challenge] then I know where to look for information. (Interviewee 5)

I can go and watch an hour's worth of static and come out thinking that was interesting whereas most people would run screaming from the building, but I think that is just because I have got so used to that, so that is what stretches me (Interviewee 22)

Yet it is interesting to note that with regards their own participation, Interviewee 22 associates being stretched and challenged with doing the type of activity that they prefer, rather than in doing new things someone else is trying to encourage them to do. This is in contradiction to a previous assertion they made about the value of “*stretching oneself*”, which they used to justify the importance of state subsidises to

support cultural participation. Then, they claimed that subsidised cultural activities were important because they encouraged people to take part in new things they would not do otherwise. Using the logic of this argument, if art-house cinema is something with which Interviewee 22 was already comfortable, then continuing to interact with it will be less challenging for them and they should be seeking to stretch their repertoire of cultural participation in a different direction. However, with regards to their own participation, Interviewee 22 was not alone in implying that they were able to “*stretch themselves*” through continuing to do the activities they preferred, did regularly, and were most familiar with. Indeed, when explicitly asked if they were being challenged to change or expand their cultural participation in any way, almost all of the interviewees stated that they neither were, nor that this even mattered:

[When asked if they were challenged to change their cultural participation] *No, that is interesting isn't it, do I get challenged? Well I suppose, you get that thing when you buy a ticket for something it says you enjoyed this, why not try that and I tend to think why don't you sod off* [laughs] (Interviewee 4)

[When asked if they were challenged to diversify their cultural participation] *No, because I can shut my eyes to it and get on with my daily life.* (Interviewee 5)
No, I have never been to see a ballet and I shouldn't have to do that. This is the thing; no one is going to be on my case about it because I work in the arts, no one is worried about me. (Interviewee 41)

None of this was seen as a problem by the interviewees because they did not perceive the choices they were already making as problematic in anyway. One must assume they are already choosing to do all the ‘right’ things to provide them with the “*life-changing experiences*” (Interviewee 38) and “*meaningful transformational engagement*” (Interviewee 12) they assume others are lacking. This is indicative of the extent to which the supposed “*transformative potential*” (Interviewee 11) of cultural participation was only ever presented as something others required. Arguably,

this is because the state does not see individuals such as those who were interviewed as being in need of transformation. Instead, such individuals are seen as the type of people who those labelled as cultural non-participants would ideally be transformed into. Indeed, such an assumption was explicitly expressed by some of the interviewees:

[When asked why no one need challenge them on their cultural participation]

Well we can challenge ourselves, can't we? I mean we are finished in that sense, no? (Interviewee 24)

[When it is pointed out that no one tries to influence the cultural choices of the interviewer as a white, middle-class, educated, white man]

Interviewee 7: *Yes, you are allowed to dabble in and out of whatever you like*

Interviewer: *And to say I like this, and I don't like that and the only reason I go is because I like what I like*

Interviewee 7: *Yeah, you don't need to be improved*

Interviewer: *I don't need to be improved? My mental health doesn't need addressed? I don't need enlightened or enriched?*

Interviewee 7: *You are self-enriching!* [laughs]

This is echoed in the literature where there are no studies exploring how cultural participation might 'transform' the affluent and university-educated individuals who make up the bulk of the audiences for state subsidised cultural activity (Belfiore, 2016; Warwick Commission, 2015). Furthermore, it would equally appear there is no concern about the choices made by those who would be recorded as a cultural non-participant in statistical surveys but are neither socially nor economically deprived or from a minority community. For example, when interviewees were asked if they would consider doing outreach work with a group of bank workers who only ever watched television, played computer games and read comics (thus statistically a cultural non-participant in Scotland) interviewees always responded as though this had been said in jest. Ergo, if a statistical cultural non-participant changed nothing

about their patterns of participation but moved to a different area and got a new job earning an average salary, then as far as the critical logics of the problem construction is concerned they would cease to have the identity of a cultural non-participant written on to them. If someone is not understood as a problem for the state, then their patterns of cultural participation are of no interest to those acting on behalf of the state.

Conclusion

Ollivier (2008) has argued that the discourses around the type of subjectivities and qualities that are desirable or undesirable in contemporary society associate privilege with openness. This has the effect of making those with the greatest status and privilege in society open by default. This mantle of openness is, in part, what allows the cultural participation patterns of such individuals to be accepted as the manifestation of a normal, desirable, and enriching model of agency that others should seek to emulate, even if the evidence would suggest that their choices are likely to be as calcified and idiosyncratic as anyone else's. In part, this is because within modern societies the lower one's status the greater one's activities are monitored and judged. This is a phenomenon that Foucault described as "descending individualism" whereby those that can employ the least power are increasingly individualised and problematised while the workings of power become more anonymous (1977, p.192). It is a process that is facilitated because of the extent to which those who can exert the greatest power over any given field are able to control the conditions of their own critique and in so doing maintain their own advantage and privilege.

This power also extends to being able to write the identities of those who can exert less power, and thus the cultural non-participant continues to be represented by

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3 cultural professionals as a person whose choices are implicitly assumed to be overly
4 narrow, closed minded and prone to a stubborn and unthinking dismissal of whole
5 categories of cultural activity. The lack of knowledge, experience, openness and/or
6 willingness to learn that is represented as core components of the subject identity of
7 the cultural non-participant presents theirs as a flawed subjectivity, problematises
8 their agency, and represents them as being in need of the input of expert mediation in
9 the form of cultural professionals in order to guide their leisure time choices. As the
10 rest of the logics in the problem construction make clear, such state sponsored
11 interventions would not only be for their own good, but also for the good of society
12 (Stevenson, 2013).
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26 Despite evidence that suggests the public are often far more open to risk
27 taking than commonly suggested (Jancovich, 2015b; Fennell et al., 2009), the
28 existence of the cultural non-participant subject identity helps maintain the discourse
29 of ignorant and risk adverse individuals whose parochial preferences would lead to
30 the dumbing down of cultural provision, to the detriment of everyone. In affirming the
31 identity of the non-participant, those who employ this subject identity to talk about
32 others – such as the interviewees in the present research - are engaged in an act of
33 micro power that suppresses the capacity of some to speak within the field of cultural
34 policy. Instead, their voices are easily co-opted by cultural professionals in order to
35 affirm the status quo and manage cultural policy towards their own advantage (see
36 Davis, 2010 and Hallward, 2005 for a discussion of how some groups can co-opt the
37 voices of others). Ultimately, anyone labeled as a cultural non-participant is denied
38 the capacity to make a meaningful contribution to how cultural policy decisions are
39 made. For the decision making practices of cultural policy remain, for the most part,
40 closed discussions between policymakers and those cultural professionals seen to
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possess the most expertise (Jancovich, 2015b). Although co-creation (Walmsley, 2013) may be welcome when customising the offer, when decisions are made about what organisations and activities will be supported with state subsidy those labeled as non-participants lose their right to speech ensuring that some cultural participation continues to 'count' more than others.

'In the real' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012) there is no one who is a cultural non-participant, but the existence of the cultural non-participant subject identity obscures the extent to which there are what Holden (2010) has described as the culturally disenfranchised: those individuals whose choices and opinions are not valued to the same degree as others. The result is that cultural policy remains elitist. Not always socially or economically elite, but culturally elite. It ignores how cultural participation is in favour of an idea of how cultural professionals believe that cultural participation should be. This paper argues that in order to deliver "popular control over the means of cultural production, redefining what counts as 'culture' and 'participation' for groups hitherto excluded by the established structures of patronage" (McGuigan, 2004, p.40) closed conversations between any form of cultural elite must be rejected in favour of a more multi-dimensional dialogue that takes into account a far greater range of perspectives about what cultural policy is for and how cultural participation in all its forms can best be supported. However, such dialogues cannot truly begin until cultural professionals cease to label certain individuals as cultural non-participants, for they must begin from the assumption of equality with regards to the status of everyone as a cultural participant. The constraints on the possibility of cultural participation must be abandoned and the ability to feel, think, value and speak in the field of cultural policy acknowledged for every person.

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- i Creative Scotland was created in 2009 out of the merger of the Scottish Arts Council and Scottish Screen
 - ii Each interview lasted between sixty and ninety minutes, resulting in over 55 hours of recorded conversations.
 - iii The names of interviewees are not included as they were told that anonymity would be ensured. Throughout the discussion interviewees are referred to numerically.
 - iv Although from the evidence provided by the interviewees even this was not always the case.
 - v The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way.
 - vi Not in education, employment or training.
 - vii The assumed prevalence of this attitude is evident from the inclusion within the Scottish Household Survey Culture and Sport Module of a question explicitly asking respondents about the extent of their agreement with the statement: “Culture and the arts are not for people like me” (Scottish Government, 2009)
 - viii Dressing up as a favourite character, often from comics or science fiction programs/films.

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Arts and the Market

Organisation	Organisation
Bongo Club	Federation of Scottish Theatres
National Museums Scotland	North Edinburgh Arts
Wester Hailes Arts (WHALE)	National Theatre of Scotland
Creative Scotland	Dundee Rep Theatre
Edinburgh International Science Festival	Scottish Chamber Orchestra
The Fruitmarket Gallery	Glasgow Life
Out of the Blue Arts and Education Trust (OOTB)	National Galleries of Scotland
Scottish Ballet	Lyceum Theatre
City of Edinburgh Council	Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland (BEMIS)
Scottish Government	Filmhouse
Surgeons Hall Museum	The Audience Business
Dance Base	Edinburgh International Festival
Playhouse Theatre	Collective Gallery
Active Inquiry Theatre Company	Edinburgh Printmakers
Voluntary Arts Scotland	ENGAGE Scotland
Still's Gallery	Take One Action Film Festival

Table 1: List of organisations represented by interviewees